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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001754

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SUBJECT: PARTY LEADERS: NO ELECTIONS/CONSTITUTION CRISIS

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 1721

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¶1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (U) Summary. Leaders of four principal political parties and/or alliances -- Lespwa, Fusion, OPL and Alyans -- met with the Ambassador on October 24. There was general agreement that the President would eventually announce senate elections, that these would be held under a new Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), that this body must have members broadly acceptable, and that Haiti was past the point where the President could impose a solution over the heads of parliament and civil society. End Summary.

'Yes' To Senatorial Elections

¶3. (U) OPL Secretary General Edgar LeBlanc, 'Fusion' Secretary General Serge Gilles, Lespwa Steering Committee

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member Anes Lubin, and 'Alyans' Secretary General Evans Paul attended an October 24 breakfast meeting at the Ambassador's residence to discuss current controversies over senate elections, appointing a new Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), and the possibility of amending the constitution. The leaders were in basic agreement that elections to renew one-third of the Senate are necessary and that the Preval government will hold them. They downplayed notions that the government will indefinitely freeze the election process or that Preval is scheming to dissolve Parliament. Evans Paul stated (and the others agreed), that President Preval neither sought nor was able to impose his will on these issues against the majority of political leaders: 'There is no possibility of Haiti returning to dictatorship.'

But Some Say 'No' To Indirect Elections

¶4. (SBU) There was disagreement among the parties on whether

the indirect elections should be held. Leblanc Fils (OPL) and Gilles (Fusion) favored adhering to the 1987 constitution, including moving forward with the decentralization process through indirect elections, which will put in place a series of local, departmental and inter-departmental assemblies. Gilles (Fusion) noted that Preval thus far has ignored the constitutional requirement for indirect elections, which he does not want. Paul (Alyans) argued that it is pointless to put in office additional regional officials when the decentralized structure of the state is a primary target for constitutional change. Lubin (Lespwa) reaffirmed that Preval wants to change the structure of the Haitian state, which Lespwa supports.

Changing the Constitution

15. (U) The party leaders concurred that President Preval's October 17 speech labeling the constitution the principal source of instability in Haiti has caused considerable uncertainty. Gilles reiterated that Preval is bound by the 1987 constitution until that constitution is changed, and that the only legitimate way to amend it is through the procedures prescribed in the constitution. Lubin of Lespwa opined that Preval intends to initiate a debate rather than impose a solution. Lubin claimed that since Preval now realizes that he does not have a social consensus, he understands that he cannot impose a change of the constitution. Paul of Alyans acknowledged that point but noted that Preval's actions on the constitution and the CEP have generated a lot of suspicion regarding his true intentions. All agreed that Preval will in all probability not seek to discard the constitution and install a constituent assembly to draft a new one from scratch, but that he would continue to pursue constitutional reform and seek a consensus on that issue.

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On Reforming the CEP

16. (SBU) Paul emphasized that there must be a compromise on the formation of a new Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) and that the President must not and will not appoint the nine members on his own authority and thereby control the council. Party leaders offered no formula for selecting members of a new CEP. Paul claimed that while Alyans was agnostic regarding the method for selecting CEP members, it would insist that the chosen CEP members be acceptable and credible. Leblanc thought that the new counselors must be well-known, while Gilles emphasized that they must be 'acceptable to all.' None of the leaders insisted that political parties be represented in the new CEP. Paul emphasized that political parties should not get involved in organizing elections. Leblanc underscored that the next CEP should be the last of the provisional electoral councils, and that it should organize the indirect elections, which will culminate in the naming of a Permanent CEP.

Comment

17. (SBU) These party leaders are concerned by Preval's October 17 statement about the constitution, but more optimistic that the immediate challenge of revamping the CEP and getting senate election preparations underway will be met. These party leaders believe that Preval has no choice but to seek a consensus on how to reconstitute the CEP, and that this decision must come quickly (reftel). The situation surrounding constitutional reform remains far murkier. We will continue to urge GOH officials to get Senate elections out of the way before tackling the constitution.
SANDERSON